siege on President Yasir Arafat has since been lifted. We consider it a positive step in the direction of peace.

Fraudulent activities of agencies in procuring passports visas

5325. SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of increasing fraudulent activities by many agencies in procuring passports/visas and also duping of innocent victims; and

(b) if so, whether any steps have been taken to prevent such activities?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) Yes, Sir. From time to time, representations are received regarding activities of unscrupulous travel agencies in procuring passports and visas on false personal particulars.

(b) Passports are normally issued within five weeks provided clear police verification report has been received and the application is complete in all respects. Short validity passports of an urgent nature can be issued on the basis of a verification certificate issued by an officer not below the rank of Deputy Secretary to the Government of India. Some of the Passport Offices have been authorized to issue passports on police report overdue basis if the police report is not received within 4 weeks. In cases, where a negative police report is received subsequent to issue of the passport, the applicants are contacted for clarification and where necessary their passports are revoked/impounded.

In August 2000, the Government had laid down more strict criteria for recognition of travel agencies authorised to submit passport application forms at the passport offices. The State police authorities have also been advised to watch the activities of unscrupulous travel agencies.

Anti-India activities of extremists from neighbouring countries

5326. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether some extremists are operating against India from neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Philippines and Bangladesh;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps proposed/taken to check these extremists and their families from taking refuge in or availing the hospitality of these countries for anti-India activities?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) to (c) The Government of India is aware of the reports that some extremists are operating against India from Bhutan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Philippines and Bangladesh. The country-wise position is as follows:

Bhutan

2. The presence of ULFA militants on Bhutanese territory has been a subject of discussion with the Government of Bhutan. Both sides share concern on the issue. The Government of Bhutan has reiterated that they would not allow their territory to be misused against the interests of India. Government of India and Bhutan remain in constant touch and are extending necessary co-operation to each other in this regard.

3. In the dialogue which the Royal Government of Bhutan had with the ULFA in June 2001, there was an agreement on closure of their camps in four places by the end of December 2001 and down-gradation of the remaining five. These four camps have since been closed.

Pakistan

4. It is widely known that as part of its policy of sponsoring cross border terrorism in India, Pakistan has been providing safe haven to several fugitives from Indian law, wanted in India in connection with heinous crimes such as the Mumbai bomb blasts of 1993, the hijacking of IC 814 to Kandahar and the December 13 attack on India's Parliament. A list of 20 individuals who are currently residing in Pakistan and are wanted in connection with heinous crimes committed in India, was handed over to Pakistan on 31.12.2001. Government have also called upon Pakistan to end its sponsorship of cross border terrorism in India and to take action on this list of 20 fugitives so that an appropriate environment is created for the resumption of a meaningful dialogue process that will move bilateral relations forward. Pakistan, however, continues to pursue its traditionally negative and hostile approaches towards India.

5. Government have been appropriately and effectively bringing to the attention of the international community facts pertaining to Pakistan's continued sponsorship of cross border terrorism in India, and the sponsorship and support provided by it to terrorists and fugitives from law.

Bangladesh

6. The Government of India is aware of the reports that agencies inimical to India's interests, including the ISI, are misusing the territory of Bangladesh for their anti-India activities. The Government of India has been regularly taking up these security-related issues with Bangladesh at different levels through diplomatic channels and institutional mechanisms existing between the two countries. The Bangladesh Government has officially stated that it will not allow undesirable elements to use its territory for activities prejudicial to the security interests of India.

Malaysia and the Philippines

7. The Government of India approach the Governments of Malaysia and the Philippines to seek their co-operation, as needed.

Interests of Indian Businessmen in Zimbabwe

5327. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item which appeared in the 'Hindustan Times' dated the 26th April 2002 under the caption "Indians are looters in Zimbabwe";

(b) whether the Indian businessmen in Zimbabwe have been facing the wrath of their militia who have asked them to hand over their properties;

(c) whether Government have taken up the matter with the Government of Zimbabwe to safeguard interests of the Indians in that country; and

(d) if so, the details thereof alongwith the action taken in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) Yes,

(b) No, Sir. The Acting Chairman of the Zimbabwe National Liberation